

Chicago Jackie Robinson West Little League stripped of U.S. championship

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Jackie Robinson West's Little League All-Stars celebrated in Chicago after the Little League World Series (Photo: Associated Press)

Little League baseball has stripped Chicago's Jackie Robinson West all-stars of the United States championship for using players who lived outside the area that team represents, the organization said in a statement.

POLL: **Should Jackie Robinson West be stripped of wins?**

Team manager Donald Butler has been suspended from Little League and Michael Kelly, the administrator for Illinois District 4, has been removed from his position. The Jackie Robinson West program has been put on probation and had its tournament privileges revoked until a new president and treasurer are appointed and the league is in compliance with Little League regulations. The national organization said it will appoint a special advisor to Illinois District 4 to help the league comply with boundary issues and bylaws.

Along with the U.S. championship, Little League stripped Jackie Robinson West of all tournament victories. The U.S. title has been awarded to Mountain Ridge Little League from Las Vegas. The Great Lakes regional title will be awarded to New Albany, Ind.; the Illinois state championship will go

to to Tri-Cities Little League in West Dundee, Ill.; and the Illinois District 4 title to Rosemoor (Chicago).

After an investigation, Little League determined that the Jackie Robinson west league used a map to determine league boundaries that did not reflect the actual boundaries and got together with officials from other nearby leagues to build a better team.

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Little League International CEO Stephen D. Keener said in a statement: “For more than 75 years, Little League has been an organization where fair play is valued over the importance of wins and losses. This is a heartbreaking decision. What these players accomplished on the field and the memories and lessons they have learned during the Little League World Series tournament is something the kids can be proud of, but it is unfortunate that the actions of adults have led to this outcome.

“As our Little League operations staff learned of the many issues and actions that occurred over the course of 2014 and prior, as painful as this is, we feel it a necessary decision to maintain the integrity of the Little League program. No team can be allowed to attempt to strengthen its team by putting players on their roster that live outside their boundaries.”

According to Little League, this is the third time that such punitive action has been taken. Little League disqualified Zamboanga (Philippines) City Little League in 1992 and the Rolando Paulino Little League from Bronx, N.Y. in 2001. The 2001 incident was related to age discrepancies involving star pitcher Danny Almonte.

In its statement, Little League said no allegations of misconduct were levied against Jackie Robinson West by a league in Illinois District 4 in the regular season, tournament season or since the reports of wrongdoing have come out, but local league officials confirmed they had “direct knowledge of this rules violation” when asked during Little League’s investigation.

In meetings last month, league officials confirmed that there was a map redrafting process that started before the 2013 season and includes maps agreed upon by the leagues but never submitted for approval. The organization said Jackie Robinson West “knowingly expanded its boundaries to include territory that belonged to other leagues in the district.”

“Little League takes these matters very seriously and has spent countless hours gathering information about the many issues facing Jackie Robinson West Little League and Illinois District 4,” Keener said. “During our review, it became clear that both Jackie Robinson West officials and District Administrator, Mike Kelly signed documents to make players eligible who should not have been.”

“Little League relies heavily on the commitment of principled volunteers to serve as a system of

checks and balances in preparation of and throughout Little League International Tournament Play. Unfortunately, no allegations against Jackie Robinson West Little League were made until well after the tournament ended, contributing to the difficulty of resolving these many complex issues. As an organization, Little League has faced issues similar to this in the past, and we felt that we must take the appropriate action set by that precedent.”

Those alleged efforts created a firestorm in Chicago when they came to light in December, and the U.S. runners-up have since asked for the U.S. title to be stripped should Jackie Robinson West be found guilty of subverting eligibility regulations.

“It’s not a matter of changing the name on the title or the championship,” Kristi Black, the president of Mountain Ridge, **told ESPN**. “The outcome of the game is what it is, and the kids have moved on. For us, it’s more of an ethics thing, a matter of doing what’s right. Our intention is to not have the next 27 kids put in this position.”

Little League took easy route in punishing kids for wrongdoing of adults



By [Jeff Passan](#)
21 hours ago
[Yahoo Sports](#)



The mouth-breathing moralists won Wednesday. They punished children for the behavior of adults. The corporation that enriches itself on the backs of unpaid labor played to type: hypocritical authoritarian bully. The little man who started this all by cocooning himself in the notion of fair play got what he wanted. And the Jackie Robinson West Little League team, a group of Chicago-area kids whose physical addresses mattered so much less than what they represented, are no longer U.S. champions.

Here's what happened: Kids from around Chicagoland joined JRW. A man named Chris Janes, who runs a league that lost a game 43-2 against JRW, complained to Little League International that the team used players from outside its boundaries. Little League investigated, found that JRW redrew the boundaries without consulting nearby leagues and [stripped it of the 2014 U.S. title](#). In a statement, Little League president Stephen Keener said: "As painful as this is, we feel it a necessary decision to maintain the integrity of the Little League program."

How this all unfolded was simultaneously farcical and typical, more or less summing up the existence

of Little League International, which ought rebrand itself NCAA Jr. Its business practices fit the part, as does its concern over a rulebook whose existence single-handedly warrants the creation of the delete key.

Rules are rules, unless those rules run contrary to the entire mission of an organization. That is the case with Little League, born in 1939 to promote children playing baseball, designed in 2015 to pocket giant sums of cash and carry the water for personal grudges. Characterizing Janes' complaints as anything else would be lipstick on a pig. Janes, who did not respond to an email seeking comment, raised hell about Little League boundaries, fully aware whatever consequences came would rain down on the very kids about whom he raved.



The Jackie Robinson West Little League team was stripped of its U.S. championship Wednesday. (REUTERS)

"Every time I saw that team play, whether it was on TV or in person, those kids were fantastic – high degree of sportsmanship, well-behaved and obviously well-coached," Janes told DNAinfo.com, the website that [broke the original story on the questionable boundaries](#). "I don't have a single bad thing to say about any one of those kids."

Just a lot of bad things to do to them. Anybody with a rational brain would understand the upshot of firing off a letter to Little League asking it to investigate. If the allegations were found to be true, the focus would stray from the league organizers – the real culprits – and hone in on the children, their families and why they would dare skirt the rules.

The answer is one that should edify Little League, not prompt scrutiny: because they wanted to play together. A group of African-American kids – a demographic that around the United States simply isn't playing baseball – banded together and ran roughshod through talented teams from around the country. Some of the kids came from nearby suburbs. All of them were in the greater Chicago area. Inside the offices of Major League Baseball, executives relished it. This wasn't forced, wasn't instituted by some higher puppeteer. The kids banded organically, and they were great.

Little League worries that allowing kids from outside districts is a Pandora's box, and that's fine. If the rules are that important, it should enforce them pre-emptively to prevent such issues from taking place. Of course, that would take money, and we know what Little League does with its money: not spend it on the kids who draw the audience for the television contract that pays millions of dollars a year. No, Little League would rather pay its top executive nearly [a half-million dollars a year than use some of its \\$80 million](#) in reserves to administer a system that doesn't have the appearance of picking

on black city kids.

Because that's what this looks like. Maybe it's just a coincidence that the first all-black U.S. champion prompted a deep dive into the residency of the players' parents. This is not to say JRW deserves some sort of special dispensation or immunity from investigation. Just that it sends a mighty bad message to a demographic baseball desperately wants to recapture after years of perceived mistreatment left it seeking better alternatives.

Look, there's wrong on the JRW side, especially at the top, where the leadership tried to persuade nearby leagues to allow JRW's gerrymandering post hoc. This was remarkably stupid and deserved discipline. The cover up, per usual, was worse than the crime. A conversation with local leaders on why this was important could have sent a better message than asking them to do something about which they already were aggrieved.

Then again, maybe it wouldn't have. According to DNAinfo.com, Janes wrote in his letter to Little League International: "In the event we do not receive a detailed response explaining how these players were eligible to play for JRW we are strongly considering obtaining outside representation to see this matter through to the end."

No wonder kids don't trust adults. This is Little League baseball. Little League. And the guy whose team got thumped by more than 40 runs wants to get litigious, all in the name of fair play.

Little League could have squelched this easily. Remove the league's top brass. That is understandable. If this is indeed an issue worth fighting for, commit to background checks that verify a child's permanent address. And then say unequivocally that its champion is its champion, because the games were played, the scores are final and no amount of revisionism can remove them.

Instead, Little League did what it always does: take the cheap, easy route. One of the tenets of Little League's motto is courage. Too bad Little League doesn't practice what it preaches. If it had any, Jackie Robinson West still would be U.S. champion

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Sports teaching kids to cheat?

Two-year study of high school athletes finds that many feel it's OK to cut corners. Some local coaches disagree with the conclusions.

February 18, 2007 | Lance Pugmire | Times Staff Writer

For generations it has been one of the great American axioms, accepted truth on diamonds, courts and gridirons everywhere: Sports builds character, instilling the values of teamwork and good sportsmanship.

But amid fresh headlines of alleged cheating in auto racing, continuing controversies over steroid use in baseball, track and cycling and ugly brawls among basketball players comes a nationwide survey suggesting a decidedly darker vision of sports.

"There is reason to worry that the sports fields of America are becoming the training grounds for the next generation of corporate and political villains and thieves," says Los Angeles ethicist Michael Josephson.

The latest two-year study of high school athletes by the Josephson Institute found a higher rate of cheating in school among student-athletes than among their classmates. It also found a growing acceptance of cheating to gain advantages in competition.

Josephson's report, based on interviews across the country with 5,275 high school athletes, concluded that too many coaches are "teaching our kids to cheat and cut corners."

The provocative findings were met with strong reactions from all sides -- some acknowledging problems while others scoffed.

James Staunton, commissioner of the 565-school California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) Southern Section, which governs high school sports for most of the Southland, said he "hopes" ethical deviance hasn't "gone that far."

"What this points out to me is that we still have a tremendous amount of work to do with our athletes, parents and coaches," Staunton said. "For all the good things we talk about in sports, and the wonderful things we promote, we're fighting some societal pressures."

The commissioner acknowledged finding "that kids are powerfully motivated for the wrong reasons."

Some established Southland prep coaches dismissed Josephson's conclusions, including Chino Hills Ayala High's Tom Gregory, a 27-year veteran basketball coach. "I've used basketball as a tool for my players to become better people," he said.

The survey's conclusions may be open to some dispute. Josephson found, for example, that about 25% of teen athletes considered rule-bending and aggressive behavior in competition acceptable. A substantial majority did not find it acceptable, though the percentage who considered that behavior acceptable had risen since a previous survey.

Among other notable survey results were:

- * At least 65% of athletes acknowledged cheating on an exam at least once within a year, compared with a 60% rate among a general student population.
- * 72% of football players acknowledged cheating.
- * 48% of baseball players believe it proper for a coach to order his pitcher to throw at an opposing batter in retaliation.
- * 37% of boys think it is acceptable for a coach to motivate a player using personal insults and vulgarity.
- * 43% of boys endorse trash-talk and showboating during games.
- * 6.4% of male athletes acknowledged using performance-enhancing drugs in the last year.

"I'm not trying to fool people, or be an alarmist," Josephson said. "But I believe in looking at these numbers; there are so many kids learning to cheat that there is cause for great concern."

He said the survey did not pinpoint "whether this enhanced propensity to cheat is due to values that put winning over honesty or a reflection of pressures to stay [academically] eligible or simply manage their time given the high demands of sports."

But Josephson said: "The fact remains that for most kids, sports promotes rather than discourages cheating."

Barbara Fiege, commissioner of the CIF City Section in Los Angeles, called the survey results "amazing to me."

She speculated that positive values of high school sports may have been diminished in recent years by a diluted pool of experienced teacher-coaches. In the City Section, for example, 40% of coaches do not teach any classes at the school, not even physical education courses.

"When your coach has not gone through four or five years of college, does not have a degree in education and is not involved in the kids' grades or classes,

there's going to be an inherent amount of drop-off in the effect they have on the kids," Fiege said.

Gregory, the coach at Ayala who disputes Josephson's findings about sports, nonetheless agrees that coaches make a big difference.

"When I see problems with undisciplined teams, many times there's a young coach on the bench," he said.

Higher incidents of poor sportsmanship can also be attributed to less-than-perfect "role models like Barry Bonds, violence in professional sports, the showcasing of kids as individuals in a team game, and parents becoming much more aggressive," Gregory said.

"It's cool now to be overly aggressive, taunting, boisterous," Gregory said. "Many kids don't want to be a yes man."

But warped values are not the fault of sports, he insisted. The failure rests on parents, teachers, coaches and role models.

Said Fiege: "Participating in sports still teaches kids the lessons of work, of working with a team, of conflict resolution, of learning to win and lose, and how to deal with a competitive world. But now there's a bigger influence on the need to win by coaches, with parents who are motivated to get their kids in the best club programs and to that elusive college scholarship.

"Now it's about more than just being a high school kid proud to be playing at your local high school."

With 660 victories and four Southern Section boys' basketball titles in 28 years of coaching, Glendora High's Mike LeDuc said his most troubling ethical concerns are the number of coaches engaged in recruiting players, the prevalence of amateur teams that displace high school team loyalties, and "illogical" parents.

Josephson "went too far if he's not saying the vast majority of players and coaches are OK," LeDuc said. "I still believe sports promotes winning, but not at all costs. We promote values ahead of success. We define winning as doing the best you can. I think you can have two winning teams on the same night."

Southern Section commissioner Staunton did not hesitate to embrace Josephson's survey.

"As kids grow and change and learn, if they're learning all along that cheating a little is OK, what will they do when they're at a greater level in life?" Staunton asked. "We have the facts of what these kids have reported to us. I can't deny this is happening. We need to do something about it.

"Sports should be the training ground to do things properly. These numbers tell us we have a ways to go, and it's on all of us -- administrators, coaches, parents and athletes."

The Southern Section holds a series of one-day training sessions for coaches to examine ethical decisions and dilemmas, and requests ethical mission statements from athletic departments.

On March 8, its council members will vote on a measure to stiffen penalties for bad behavior by athletes -- banning players for the remainder of any season in which they are ejected from two games. Two ejections now result in a two-game suspension.

"Our belief is to install more punitive measures," Staunton said. "Education is the answer. We want our athletes to accept that wrong is wrong, not to dismiss what they do as part of the game."

Sure penalties tend to deter cheating, according to the student survey, Josephson said. He credited NASCAR and the NBA officials with setting a good example. NASCAR removed driver Michael Waltrip's crew chief from Sunday's Daytona 500 after a banned fuel additive was found in his race car. The NBA imposed a 15-game suspension on Denver star Carmelo Anthony for fighting during a game.

"We have bad sports in athletics, in the political world and in the business environment," Josephson said. "These people are polluting it, and in some cases, they're corrupting it."

The City Section's Fiege commended Josephson's strong words.

"I'd venture to say he's saying these things to make the very strong point that this is a crisis," she said. "He might be going a little overboard to get people's attention, but this surely deserves attention, because whatever we've done to this point isn't working."

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Unsportsmanlike conduct

The ethics and values of young athletes are often adversely affected by their sports experiences, according to a report by the Josephson Institute of Ethics. A look at some of the results:

Q. A coach orders a player to "attack" a preexisting injury of a top scorer on the other team.

Percentage of boys who think it's proper

Wrestling: 44%

Football: 39%

Tennis: 30%

Volleyball: 29%

Baseball: 27%

Overall*: 29%

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Q. Cheated on a test in high school in the past year

Boys who cheated at least once

Football: 72%

Hockey: 70%

Baseball: 69%

Basketball: 68%

Wrestling: 62%

Volleyball: 60%

Overall*: 65%

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Girls who cheated at least once

Softball: 72%

Cheerleading: 71%

Basketball: 71%

Soccer: 68%

Track: 64%

Overall*: 65%

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*Overall percentage for boys also includes cross-country, gymnastics, soccer, swimming, tennis, track and volleyball. Overall percentage for girls also includes cross-country, gymnastics, swimming, tennis and volleyball.

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Q. Used racial slurs or insults in the past 12 months

Boys

No: 48%

Yes: 52%

Girls

Yes: 29%

No: 71%

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Percentage who think it's proper for a coach to instruct a player in football to fake an injury to get a needed time out

Boys: 37%

Girls: 20%

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Source: Josephson Institute. Graphics reporting by Lance Pugmire